



THE ORGAN

St. Michael, Highgate

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David Tillett

Front cover photo
The pipes of the Choir Organ

Introduction by the Vicar

Not every generation of Parishioners finds itself confronted with the problem of knowing what best to do when faced with an organ which, according to professional advice, is evidently coming to the end of its useful working life. Such was the problem brought before the Parochial Church Council of this parish in the early 1980's along with other pressing matters to do with the upkeep of the fabric of the Church and the provision of additional facilities to meet the needs of today's congregations.

As can be imagined, priorities had to be established and the whole question of meeting the costs examined. An agreement was reached by the members of the PCC which allowed the rebuilding of the organ to go ahead but not before every other possible alternative had been looked into carefully; e.g. no organ, string quartet, grand piano, electronic organ.

The siting of the instrument was also raised and a suggestion that it be returned to its original position at the west end of the Church was rejected on the grounds that the structural alterations needed would add considerably to the costs. Future generations will no doubt speculate on whether or not this was a wise decision; but apart from any considerable expenditure involved in such a move, it was also felt that the forms of the liturgy used in the Church today, encouraging as they do more active involvement on the part of congregations, continued to support the concept (born of the Oxford Movement) of choir and organ being placed at the east end of the Church as distinct from the west.

Fortuitously, the parish had meantime disposed of its parish hall in North Road, which was fast becoming a liability and was little used by the congregation. The proceeds of the sale enabled a loan to be advanced to an already existing Organ Fund, generously topped up by the proceeds of musical events in 1982-83 to mark the 150th anniversary of the consecration of St. Michael's Church, together with donations from interested parishioners. The organ rebuild and associated work has been achieved at a cost of £83,000.

The original organ, built in 1842 at the west end, had undergone four rebuilds and a move to the east end. The newly rebuilt instrument of today contains some of the original pipework and maintains part of the character of its immediate predecessor. Its modern tonal design and comprehensive resources are bound to attract wide-spread interest and attention. It is primarily intended to accompany the liturgy of the Church, but will also feature as a recital instrument.

No project of this magnitude is possible without the commitment and expertise of certain individuals. Their efforts have come to fruition, enabling us in this Parish to have, for generations to come, an instrument of which we can be justly proud. This is an occasion for rejoicing and for giving thanks to everyone associated with it —

the PCC and parishioners of St. Michael's Church

the Organist and Choirmaster

the Churchwarden responsible for oversight

the Advisory Committee

the Architects involved in the organ case design

various firms who gave assistance

and last, but by no means least, the organ builders (Nicholson of Malvern), their Tonal Director and craftsmen;

we offer our profound thanks and say 'gloria in excelsis Deo'

John J. Fielding

A History of the Organ

The church records of St. Michael, Highgate, tell us that the first organ was built in 1842, when Thomas Gardner was appointed Organist. Twelve organists and five rebuilds later, some of the original pipework is still retained in the present instrument, although it is perhaps doubtful whether the congregation of 1842 would recognise the fact.

1842 & 1873

The organ of 1842 was built by Messrs. Gray & Davison in the west end gallery, at a cost of £700 — which was mostly defrayed by a double pew rent for one year. It was a three manual and pedal instrument of 19 stops, although the Swell, Choir and Pedal were short compass and there were no manual to pedal couplers. In 1859 it was cleaned and lowered to a new position, possibly to overcome the distance between congregation and organ accompaniment. Certainly for this reason, a harmonium was purchased in 1869 and placed at the upper end of the centre aisle for weekday services.

By 1873 the instrument was in need of further cleaning and modernising, with a view to the 'improvement of singing', and this work was undertaken by the original builders at a cost of £61. Being one of the few remaining organs still tuned to the old system, it was retuned to equal temperament, so that music could be played in every key. The reeds were improved and the Cornopean rank — which had been prepared for in the original instrument — was now added. Further work included a new set of pedals from CC - E, extending the compass by nine notes and adding nine new Open Diapason pipes; the provision of Great-Pedal and Choir-Pedal couplers and the attainment of a steadier wind supply from the bellows. This was a comprehensive instrument for the time.

Great Organ (CC - G)	Swell Organ (Tenor C)	Choir Organ (Tenor C)	Pedal Organ (CC - E)
Double Open Diapason	Bourdon	Open Diapason	Open Diapason
Open Diapason	Open Diapason	Dulciana	
Stopped Diapason	Stopped Diapason	Stopped Diapason	
Principal	Principal	& Clarabella	Great - Pedal
Twelfth	Cornopean	Principal	Choir - Pedal
Fifteenth	Oboe	Flute	Swell - Great
Mixture		Clarinet	

1885

The dramatic introduction of an east end surplined choir in 1881 with 18 boys in addition to the men, accentuated the distance between organ, choir and congregation. This resulted in the June report of 1883, circulated to all parishioners, recommending a new, or almost new organ in the east end, to cost £650. It took twelve months and much persuasion for the project to catch the imagination and resources of the parish. Once £643 had been promised, Messrs. Hill & Son were employed to build an organ comprising 26 stops at the east end and work began in September 1884.

Great Organ (CC - G)	Swell Organ (CC - G)	Choir Organ (CC - G)	Pedal Organ (CCC - F)
Double Diapason	Bourdon	Open Diapason	Open Diapason
*Open Diapason	Open Diapason	Dulciana	*Bourdon
Open Diapason	Stopped Diapason	Stopped Diapason	*Violoncello
Stopped Diapason	*Salicional(grooved)	& Clarabella	
Principal	*Vox Angelica T.C.	Principal	Great - Pedal
*Wald Flute	Principal	Flute	Swell - Pedal
Twelfth	*Fifteenth	*Flautina	Choir - Pedal
Fifteenth	*Mixture	Cremona	Swell - Great
Mixture III	Cornopean		Swell - Choir
*Trumpet	Oboe		Swell - Great octave
	*Clarion	*new stops	6 composition pedals

This was a substantial rebuild with entirely new tracker action, new keys, pedals and bellows. The old Great soundboard was adapted to the Choir Organ and some pipework retained, but new soundboards were built for Great, Swell and Pedal and several new stops added. The short compass Choir and Swell were now extended with new basses and in some cases the trebles of the old pipework were transposed to increase scale. Moving the organ to the east end required a new case which was designed by Messrs. Hill & Son, built in oak to match the choir stalls and given by Mrs. Lovell as a memorial to her husband. The upper part of this case still stands today. The organ was dedicated on January 25th 1885, which was observed as the anniversary of the consecration of the Church.

1911

Following the complete breakdown of the organ on several occasions in 1910, Messrs. Brindley & Foster were contracted to rebuild and further enlarge the instrument, replacing the worn-out tracker action with tubular-pneumatic. Their additions consisted of the Pedal Violone, Sub Bass and seven of the eight enclosed Choir stops, the old Cremona being revoiced as a Clarinet. These additions were placed in the farthest eastern bay of the Church, requiring a new case which was dedicated to the memory of Mr. Smithett, a late churchwarden. Part of this case forms the eastern side of the present organ. The new console was detached and stood on the north side of the altar, with the player facing south. This four department and pedal instrument, playable from three manuals, now included some of the most delicate stops available at the time, which also meant a certain amount of inter-departmental duplication. A full appraisal of the instrument, 30 years later, appeared in the July 1943 edition of The Organ magazine by J. Stewart Archer. The cost of the rebuild was £900.

Great Organ	Swell Organ	Choir & Solo unenclosed
Double Diapason	Bourdon	Open Diapason
Open Diapason I	Open Diapason	Clarabella
Open Diapason II	Stopped Diapason	Dulciana
Stopped Diapason	Salicional	Principal
Wald Flute	Celeste	Flute
Principal	Principal	Flautina
Twelfth	Fifteenth	enclosed
Fifteenth	Mixture II	*Hohl Flute
Mixture III	Oboe	*Dolce
Trumpet	Cornopean	*Celeste
	Clarion	*Viol
		*Harmonic Flute
		*Orchestral Oboe
		Clarinet
		*Vox Humana
		Tremulant
Pedal Organ		
*Sub Bass	Usual couplers, but	
Bourdon	no choir to great	
*Violone		
Open Diapason		
Violoncello	* new stops	

1958

This rebuild was undertaken at a cost of £4000 by the firm Rest Cartwright, to which the Organist of the time, Ivor Davies belonged. Once more the action was changed, this time from tubular-pneumatic to electro-pneumatic with a new detached console in dark oak on the north side of the altar, the player facing west. The four departments were reduced to three with a new Choir chest using Roosevelt action, together with a Dulciana extension rank on a separate chest. The remaining unenclosed Choir stops were discarded together with the Vox Humana. Whilst the keyboards extended from CC - C only the Choir had pipes beyond G. A Tromba-Trombone rank was added to Great and Pedal respectively and the Pedal further increased by a second Bourdon and its 8 ft. and 4 ft. extensions. The Bassett Horn replaced the Swell Bourdon and additional couplers and tremulant were now available. A Trompette was added to the Choir in memory of G. T. Pinches, a previous Organist of the Church and teacher of Ivor Davies.

• SWELL •

- TREMULANT
- CLARION 4
- CORNOPEAN 8
- OBOE 8
- CONTRA FAGOTTO 16
- PLEIN JEU 8-16
- FIFTEENTH 2
- FLUTE 4
- PRINCIPAL 4
- LIEBLICH GEDECKT 8
- OPEN DIAPASON 8
- SALICIONAL 8
- VOIX CELESTE 8
- UNISON OFF
- OCTAVE
- SUB OCTAVE

• PEDAL •

- POSAUNE 8
- OPHICLEIDE 16
- SM FAGOTTO 16
- OCTAVE FLUTE 4
- FIFTEENTH 4
- BASS FLUTE 8
- PRINCIPAL 8
- BOURDON 16
- VIOLONE 16
- OPEN WOOD 16
- SUBBASS 32
- GREAT TO PEDAL
- SWELL TO PEDAL
- SWELL OCTAVE TO PEDAL
- CHOIR TO PEDAL





1985 The rebuild by Nicholson of Malvern

By 1977 the organ was a sad and dim reflection of its former character. After four rebuilds, much of its personality has been lost and the musical and mechanical shortcomings were all too evident — constant winds leaks and syphers, a very weak treble to most ranks and a completely unuseable Choir department. The physical layout of the instrument and console also required redesigning for the organ was spread poorly over two bays of the Church with a hidden console of no musical merit. The general effect of the organ was well suited to the building and style of worship at St. Michael's and the instrument contained some good quality pipework which had survived each rebuild.

The decision was made to establish the musical integrity of the organ whilst respecting the liturgical requirements of the parish. This resulted in a relatively unfashionable approach; a comprehensive rebuild incorporating the best of the old pipework into a substantial 3-manual instrument with electro-pneumatic action and traditional 'Parish Church' specification, including a new enclosed Choir division. The PCC placed the contract with Nicholson of Malvern, and the Organist was appointed Consultant, to draw up the specification and liaise with the builder throughout the project.

The role of the organ in public worship is one of glory to God. In this respect liturgical needs have been met first, in the provision of a firm and comfortable Great chorus for hymn accompaniment, a tonally and dynamically wide-ranging 'English' Swell and an independent and supportive Pedal department. The Choir division placed immediately above the north-side choir stalls, is not designed as a small Great, but provides new colour and choir support in appropriate parts of the liturgy such as chanting and anthems.

The addition of upperwork in the two new mixtures and Great Fifteenth is sufficient in this acoustically sympathetic building and the Swell octave couplers are provided only for special effects, being redundant in the 'full swell' combination. The reeds have been given thorough attention and recomposition, now providing a chorus Trumpet, a bold and rich Cornopean and a thrilling solo Tuba, able to hold its own in single notes against Full Organ. Whilst on paper the flutes may appear to duplicate, the aural reality is of a subtle but distinct voice-character to each rank, giving great flexibility and choice. The new flutes are wide-scaled and the revoiced Great flute now has clarity and real personality. The Viola is in effect a delightful small diapason making a very useful swell-great link in dynamic growth.

By careful design Nicholsons have been able to contain the organ in one bay of the Church whilst ensuring the proper egress of sound from each department — Swell and Choir speaking into the Chancel, Great and Pedal into the Nave. The instrument has been raised as high as physically possible, giving greater aural space beneath. The fully refurbished console, whilst not ideally placed for organ, choir and congregational ensemble, merits its position by being in touch with the chancel but not a distraction from the nave. At the time of writing, the lower structure is yet to be painted and the project of cleaning and restoring the facade pipes yet to be entertained.

Supported by the Nicholson team of carpenter, electrician, metal-hand, designer and builders, the Tonal Director, Dennis Thurlow, has achieved a resourceful instrument which is an exciting example of modern tonal design. It is able to accompany the liturgy and festivals of the Church together with School and Choral Society occasions. On such an instrument music of any period can be made to sound artistically convincing.

It is the hope that the people of Highgate and those further afield, will treasure and enjoy this instrument for many years to come.

Alan K. Gray — *Organist*

Specification

The specification was drawn up by Alan K. Gray — the Organist of the Church —
in full consultation with Nicholson of Malvern.

PEDAL ORGAN, 11 stops, 4 couplers

1 Sub Bass (18 from No.4-12 acoustic)	W	32
2 Open Wood	W/M	16
3 Violone	M	16
4 Bourdon	W	16
*5 Principal	M	8
6 Bass Flute (18 from No.4)	W	8
*7 Fifteenth (18 from No.5)	M	4
8 Octave Flute (18 from No.4 & 6)	W	4
9 Fagotto (from No.41)	M	16
10 Ophicleide (18 from No.21)	M	16
11 Posaune (from No.21)	M	8

I Choir to Pedal
II Great to Pedal
III Swell to Pedal
IV Swell octave to Pedal

CHOIR ORGAN, 11 stops, 1 coupler (enclosed)

*12 Gedeckt	M/W	8
13 Dulciana	M	8
*14 Principal	M	4
*15 Open Flute	M	4
*16 Nazard	M	2 ² / ₃
*17 Gemshorn	M	2
*18 Tierce	M	1 ³ / ₅
*19 Larigot	M	1 ¹ / ₃
20 Clarinet	M	8

V Tremulant

21 Tuba (unenclosed)	M	8
22 Tuba (49 from No.21)	M	4

VI Swell to Choir

GREAT ORGAN, 10 stops, 2 couplers

23 Double Open Diapason	M	16
24 Open Diapason	M	8
25 Stopped Flute	W	8
*26 Viola	M	8
27 Octave	M	4
28 Wald Flute	W	4
29 Twelfth	M	2 ² / ₃
*30 Fifteenth	M	2
*31 Fourniture	M	III/IV
32 Trumpet	M	8

VII Choir to Great
VIII Swell to Great

SWELL ORGAN, 12 stops, 3 couplers

33 Open Diapason	M	8
34 Lieblich Gedeckt	W	8
35 Salicional	M	8
36 Voix Celeste T.C.	M	8
37 Principal	M	4
*38 Flute	M	4
39 Fifteenth	M	2
*40 Plein Jeu	M	IV/V
41 Contra Fagotto	M	16
42 Oboe	M	8
43 Cornopean	M	8
44 Clarion	M	4

IX Tremulant
X Octave
XI Sub octave
XII Unison off

COMBINATION COUPLERS

XIII Pedal to Great pistons
XIV Great to Pedal pistons

* new pipework



ACCESSORIES

Eight combination foot pistons to the Pedal Organ
 Eight combination foot pistons to the Swell Organ
 Six combination pistons to the Choir Organ
 Eight combination pistons to the Great Organ
 Eight combination pistons to the Swell Organ
 Reversible piston to No.21
 Reversible foot piston to Great to Pedal
 Reversible piston to Great to Pedal
 Reversible piston to Choir to Pedal
 Reversible piston to Choir to Great
 Reversible piston to Swell to Choir
 Reversible foot piston to Swell to Great
 Reversible piston to Swell to Great
 General cancel piston
 Setter piston - two settings available
 Two balanced expression pedals to Choir and Swell Organs

WIND PRESSURES

Great 3½"	Swell 3½"	Choir 2¾"	Pedal 4"
Tuba/Ophicleide 6½"		Action 5"	

The manual compass is CC - C 61 notes
 The pedal compass is CCC - F 30 notes
 The pitch is c = 523 vibrations at 64°F
 The blowing plant is by Messrs. Watkins & Watson
 44 speaking stops and 14 couplers etc. making a
 total of 58 drawstops
 Total number of pipes: 2523

Organists of St. Michael's Highgate

1842 - 1873	Thomas Gardner
1873 - 1884	Henry J. Lawner
1884 - 1893	Charles E. Metcalfe
1893 - 1895	H. A. Weeldon
1895 - 1909	George T. Fleming
1909 - 1936	George T. Pinches
1936 - 1937	Ernest F. Mather
1937 - 1939	J. W. Horton
1940 - 1947	G. N. Cove
1947 - 1971	Ivor R. Davies
1971 - 1974	Peter M. Wright
1974 - 1976	Stephen O. Barber
1977 -	Alan K. Gray

